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SUBJECT: AT LEAST 89 DEAD AND 100 INJURED IN DRC  
TRAIN-WRECK

¶1. (U) Summary: A train wreck August 1 caused at least 89 fatalities and 100 casualties in the DRC's central Kasai Occidental province. A delegation of ministers, journalists, and aid workers traveled the following day to the crash site where the local population called for improved railway conditions. MONUC, OCHA, and other UN organizations are providing humanitarian assistance. The threat of an infectious diseases outbreak, however, remains a concern as not all bodies have been removed from the wreckage. The National Railway Company (SNCC) hoped to have the site cleared by August 7. There are no reports of Americans traveling on the train. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) A cargo train derailed August 1 at approximately 11:00 p.m. in the remote town of Kakenge, some 170 km north of Kananga in Kasai Occidental, while en route from the Kasai River port town of Ilebo. The train, intended primarily for transporting cargo, was carrying corn to Kananga, in addition to an unknown number of passengers, many of whom were believed to have been on board without authorization or proper seating. According to the National Railway Company (SNCC), this is the second derailment to occur in this section of track within the last three weeks.

¶3. (SBU) There are conflicting reports as to the number of confirmed deaths. MONUC officials reported August 5 that representatives of the provincial Crisis Committee, set up after the accident, have identified 89 dead and over 100 injured. According to local medical sources, however, 92 deaths and 210 injured have been counted, including five cases requiring MONUC evacuation to Kananga. The injured have been taken to a local hospital 12 km from the crash site. No Amcits are known to have been traveling on the train. Regional officials said they expected the death toll to increase once equipment arrives to move heavy wreckage, allowing search teams to recover bodies trapped underneath. Noting the proximity of the wreck site to the Lwembe River, the only water source in the area, humanitarian organizations are concerned about a possible outbreak of infectious diseases if these bodies are not removed immediately.

¶4. (SBU) Two MONUC special flights transported a delegation of medical staff and GDRC ministers with over two tons of medications to the accident site on August 3. OCHA delivered pharmaceuticals and foodstuffs by road that day, though the vehicles transporting the material broke down and delayed their arrival. A third MONUC flight arrived August 6, though without additional beds and linens which had been ordered for the hospital. To date, over ten tons of medications and foodstuffs have been delivered to the area - eight tons from the GDRC and two tons from the UN Coordinator for

Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). CARITAS and the Red Cross are providing ground support to the local community.

¶15. (U) A GDRC delegation from Kinshasa, led by Minister of the Interior Denis Kalume Numbi, and including the Ministers of Public Health, Transport and Communications, and Humanitarian Affairs, visited the crash site along with journalists and medical personnel August 2. Members were met by calls on the GDRC to rehabilitate the rail system, which in this area is over 70 years old. The delegation returned to Kinshasa August 4 after air and ground tours of the wreckage and mass grave sites.

¶16. (SBU) Local SNCC workers told Radio Okapi that "the accident is certainly due to worn-out and defective equipment." They claimed that the train picked up speed when its brakes failed, causing seven of ten cars to overturn. In response to this claim, Minister of Transportation Remy Kuseyo Gatanga noted that, given the fact that this was supposed to be a cargo train, travelers involved in the accident were likely riding illegally, reflecting flaws in the SNCC's check-in system. An official fact-finding mission investigating the causes of the accident and organized by MONUC continues.

¶17. (SBU) Kasai Occidental Governor Tresor Kapuko, told PolOff August 4 he believed the accident was due to the poor condition of the tracks themselves, which he claimed had not been repaired "in years." A recent mission to the DRC by a US Trade and Development Agency (USTDA) contractee met with representatives of the Ministry of Transport and SNCC and drew similar conclusions. They were told that the lack of maintenance and deteriorated condition of rails, many of which need replacement, has contributed to numerous derailments along the entire SNCC system from the Zambian

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border to Ilebo.

¶18. (U) Comment: While the causes of this accident remain unconfirmed by officials, it must be assumed that the dilapidated conditions of the railway system, including both rails and rolling stock, factored heavily in the accident. The difficulty of getting humanitarian aid to the affected area by either road or air, in addition to the accident itself, further reflects the poor state of DRC infrastructure. End comment.  
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